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Letters to The Times

Charges on Cuba Assailed

Senator Keating Is Challenged on Sources for Data

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

If you repeat a tall tale often enough, they say, eventually people will believe it. I would never have thought The New York Times' editor-in-chief would succumb to this cynical brand of "news" management, but judging from your April 29 editorial "Cloudy Intelligence," he has.

For months Senator Keating has been telling the country he possessed some independent source of intelligence about Cuba far more reliable than the product of our established Government intelligence agencies. Such a claim is absurd.

In the interests of accurate reporting, then, let me try to set the record straight:

It is by no means a fact that Senator Keating is getting his information from "Government intelligence agencies." On the contrary, he has repeatedly refused to identify any of his sources. But obviously his information could never have come from Government sources because, as I myself have often proved, it has been variously vague, misleading, semi-contradictory, and downright false.

Neither the Government's "intelligence judgments" nor its actions in the Cuban crisis were ever misled by any false estimates as to Soviet intentions. The rumor that long-range missiles were being installed in Cuba had been widely peddled in Washington last September. It came to our committee, as it came to all Government intelligence agencies. Senator Keating was by no means the only one to hear of it.

Checks by U-2

Although this rumor was contrary to a belief held by some Government Kremlinologists, everything possible was done to check it out. Until the U-2 flight of Oct. 14, all these efforts, however, failed to turn up any proof. Yet the Government kept on looking, and the flight which did uncover the proof had actually been ordered before the junior Senator from New York made his Oct. 10 Senate speech publicizing the missile rumor. But between rumor and proof lies a vast gulf.

As of Oct. 10 Senator Keating had

Oct. 10 speech "indicates that" his information was markedly different from the situation we actually uncovered in Cuba.

The evanescent quality of the Senator's private intelligence was best shown by his charge made on Jan. 31 that he had "continuing, absolutely confirmed and undeniable evidence" that the "concrete" Soviet missile bases in Cuba had never been destroyed. This charge was demolished by Secretary McNamara's TV briefing. Yet even today the Senator has never told us how his "continuing, absolutely confirmed and undeniable evidence" could turn out to have been so phony.

Against such an unprepossessing background, the Senator's latest charges about new Russian troops in Cuba deserve only a "ho-hum" classification. Admittedly it is harder to be proved wrong when talking about troop strength than about unbroken concrete pads. But the burden of proof is still on the one who challenges official estimates. Having made his charges, the Senator again has run away from any honest effort to substantiate them.

No Political Motivation

Once the irresponsible nature of the Keating attack on our intelligence is recognized, the problem you pose to see of top intelligence estimates reaching the President which are politically motivated and hence not "completely objective" disappears. It is hardly worthy of The Times to suggest that American intelligence is politically colored because "The men who provide these judgments are appointees of the President's own Administration."

After all, the nation's top intelligence official, Central Intelligence Agency Director John A. McCone, is a respected Republican, the head of our Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieut. Gen. Joseph Carroll, a lifelong expert in his field, is devoid of any political affiliation. On the basis of their performance no reasonable person can possibly conclude that our estimates would bear any more of a distinctive Democratic coloration with Clark Clifford as chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board than if until now they have borne a distinctive Republican coloration under John McCone as director of C.I.A.

SAMUEL S. STRATTON,
Member, House Committee on the
Armed Services.

Washington, May 1, 1963.